

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT

Fiscal Year 2005

Over the past few years, the Information Technology (IT) Department has strategically constructed a robust and secure technology infrastructure capable of supporting many more users, computers and devices. This fully connected infrastructure consists of printing systems, e-mail and collaboration systems, website systems, file systems, database systems, wireless systems, backup systems, security systems and much more.

This year, following a detailed analysis of current technology systems employed by the Jones Library and its branches, the IT Department offered its technology infrastructure, network resources and support services to the Jones Library and branches. The project was a multifaceted migration which not only linked the libraries together for the first time, but also linked the Town and libraries, allowing for increased staff collaboration and a major consolidation of network resources.

The IT Department also became responsible for supporting the libraries' current and future technology needs. When the migration was complete, library staff had access to many long overdue network technology resources, a robust and reliable network, daily support from the Town's IT Helpdesk and peace of mind, knowing that network backup and security systems are being meticulously maintained. Future library capital appropriations will not need to be used to improve technology infrastructure systems; instead, funds can now be concentrated on replacing antiquated computers, printers and patron-servicing systems. Additionally, the libraries will now benefit from all current and future network technology systems implemented by the Town, including new the Town-wide internet protocol (IP) phone system planned for next year.

One of the new, publicly accessible technologies the IT Department deployed during the library technology migration was the new Public Wireless Internet service. This service was initially deployed as an experiment, but quickly proved to be a success and very popular. Patrons can now bring any Wi-Fi-enabled notebook or handheld computer to the library and easily connect to this high-speed internet service free of charge. Next year the IT Department plans to expand this service to the Town Hall, Bangs Community Center, Town Common and Sweetser Park.

Another publicly accessible technology maintained by the IT Department is the Town's website. This year the IT Department spent much time redeveloping the infrastructure of Town's main website, www.amherstma.gov, making it possible to convert other Town websites to a similar yet individualized look and feel. The first department to make use of the new design elements was the Police Department. By changing only the color schemes and imagery of the Town's newly developed shell, the IT Department was able to easily modernize the Police website, www.amherstpd.org. The new site is consistent with the Town's, yet individualized for the Police Department. In the coming year, the IT Department plans to expand these design elements to the Leisure Services website, www.lsse.org. This will bring us one step closer to the ultimate goal of having a unified web presence for Town departments.

Prior to June of this year, the Town-wide area network consisted of ten buildings. One of the facilities that had not been connected was the Waste Water Treatment Plant. This year, the IT Department deployed long-range high-speed wireless communications to this facility, providing staff with much needed access to the many technology infrastructure resources available to the

rest of the Town. Water Treatment staff can now access and share databases, files, printers and more with the other Public Works and Town staff.

Most Town departments now rely on IT-administered technology systems in order to perform daily functions. Over the past few years, the responsibilities of the IT Department have more than tripled, making the need to continually improve operations within the IT Department essential. Consolidating and standardizing the types of technologies employed by the Town is an important key to improving the proficiency of the IT Department. Among several other consolidation projects this year, the IT Department migrated all desktop operating systems to Microsoft Windows XP and all server operating systems to Microsoft Windows 2003.

As more and more technology systems have been added, the IT Department has been mindful of the increase in energy consumption required. To deal with this, the Department took several steps towards minimizing energy consumption, including configuring Windows XP desktops and laptops to automatically power off monitors and initiate low power consumption mode during inactivity, purchasing flat panel monitors, and purchasing only EPA Energy Star-compliant devices. The Department attempts to set an example in making choices and implementing technologies which are environmentally sensitive.

In addition to the many projects completed this year, the IT Department worked diligently behind the scenes maintaining, repairing and updating current systems. With the ever-increasing amount of “junk” e-mail and the constant threat of viruses and hackers, upgrades to servers, PCs and other technology systems become a daily necessity. The IT Department maintains several layers and types of specialized security hardware and software, lowering the risk of unauthorized network intrusion and viruses. The Department also maintains a variety of backup systems, both onsite and offsite, ensuring that in a disaster the Town’s information and systems would be safe.

In the coming year, the IT Department will continue to maintain software and infrastructure standards, extend more information and tools to constituents via the Town’s websites, provide departments with the necessary technologies to operate efficiently, and leverage new technologies in ways which will serve Amherst residents for years to come.

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